

RABIES ALERT FROM THE MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) has identified a significant increase in the number of rabies positive animals from Worcester County. The data indicate a 77% increase in positive reports during the second quarter (April through June) as compared to earlier this year. These positive animals have been clustered in several parts of Worcester County. This second quarter increase did not occur in 2006 and therefore does not appear to be a seasonal event. This alert is intended for all towns that have had at least one positive animal, and their immediate surrounding towns. MDPH is providing this information to encourage you to be on the alert for possible rabies positive animals and potential human exposures. Reminders: all Raccoons, skunks, cats, foxes and woodchucks are the terrestrial animals most likely to be rabid in Massachusetts. Wild or stray mammals that potentially expose a person to rabies through a bite, scratch or introduction of the animals saliva into the eyes, nose, mouth or a fresh, open cut, should be submitted for rabies testing. Domestic animals that are potentially exposed to rabies should be reported to the Bureau of Animal Health at 617-626-1794 for appropriate follow-up.

From Dr. DeMaria, Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Steps you can take to protect yourself, your family and your pets from rabies:

- * Make sure your pets are vaccinated against rabies and that their shots are up-to-date. By law, all dogs, cats and ferrets must be vaccinated against rabies.
- * Avoid wild animals, especially bats, skunks, foxes, and raccoons. Do not feed or pet strays. Avoid any animal-wild, farm or pet-that you do not know. Report any animal that behaves oddly to your local animal control official.
- * Teach your children to avoid wildlife, strays, and all other animals they do not know well.
- * Do not handle dead, sick, or injured wild animals yourself; call the police or animal control officer. If you must handle the animal, use heavy gloves, sticks or other tools to avoid direct contact.
- * Feed pets indoors and keep them indoors at night. If they are outside during the day, keep them on a leash or fenced in so they cannot wander. It is possible for vaccinated pets to get rabies. Pets allowed to roam freely are more likely to get rabies and possibly expose people and other pets in your home.
- * Fasten trash can lids tightly. Garbage attracts animals (like skunks, raccoons, and strays) looking for an easy meal.